



CITY OF DURHAM | NORTH CAROLINA

Date: November 8, 2011

To: Thomas J. Bonfield, City Manager
Through: Theodore L. Voorhees, Deputy City Manager
From: Mark D. Ahrendsen, Director of Transportation
John Tallmadge, Director of Commuter Resources, Triangle Transit

Subject: Update on Designing Better Bus Service in Durham

Executive Summary

The FY2012 Transportation Department budget includes a Comprehensive Operational Analysis of the DATA system, which has been given the name of Designing Better Bus Service in Durham. The analysis will be completed in June 2012 and the result will be a 3-year plan for DATA services aimed at improving the passenger experience for current riders and attracting new riders. The Durham Area Transit Authority (DATA), managed by Triangle Transit on behalf of the City of Durham, has selected a consultant, Parsons Brinkerhoff, to conduct the analysis. The analysis will involve extensive public engagement, which began in March 2011 with a survey distributed to passengers and the general public. The results of the on-board customer satisfaction survey are provided in Attachment A. Public workshops are planned to collect feedback at four (4) critical stages in the process: November 2011, January 2012, March 2012, and May 2012. A Sounding Board has been established consisting of twenty-five (25) members of the public representing diverse interests and backgrounds of the Durham community. The Sounding Board will meet regularly throughout the study process with Triangle Transit and the consultant and will present recommendations to the City Council along with the Final Draft Plan in June 2012.

Draft goals for the Durham Area Transit Authority have been developed as part of this project (Attachment B). These draft goals will be available for public comment during the November public workshops. The final goals will be used to guide the development of services in the plan.

A Draft Plan for Designing Better Bus Service in Durham will be presented to the City Council in March 2012, at which time a public hearing will be held. The City Council will be requested to adopt the Final Draft Plan in June 2012.

Recommendation

1. It is recommended that the City Council receive the information about Designing Better Bus Service in Durham including draft Goals for the Durham Area Transit Authority and provide comments on any aspect of the project.

Background

The City of Durham approached Triangle Transit in 2010 to discuss the possibility of Triangle Transit managing Durham's transit services including improving the connections with regional transit services. In October 2010, Triangle Transit assumed the responsibilities for the planning, operations, and marketing for Durham's transit services. Included in the agreement was a request to conduct a thorough study of the transit system to assess the effectiveness of the service in meeting the needs of the City of Durham residents. As such, funding was included in the Transportation Department budget to conduct a Comprehensive Operational Analysis, also known as Designing Better Bus Service in Durham.

The most recent analyses of the DATA transit system have been conducted in 2003 and 2008. The current analysis will take a fresh look at the existing DATA system to see how the City of Durham resources can better meet the needs of the Durham community. The on-board survey conducted in April 2011 revealed that reliability is a significant issue for current passengers. Triangle Transit distributed a survey to the general public in the spring of 2011, which revealed that riders and non-riders alike are interested in more direct and frequent services during high demand times of day and to high demand locations. In addition, Triangle Transit has received direction from the City to look at ways for the DATA services to attract choice riders.

On-Board Customer Satisfaction Survey

Durham Area Transit Authority (DATA) and Triangle Transit engaged AECOM and CJI Research in 2011 to conduct an onboard survey of riders of DATA buses, with a special supplementary survey of riders of DATA's newest route, the Bull City Connector (BCC). The purpose of the study was to provide information useful to the Designing Better Bus Service process. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish.

The survey process is critical to understanding who DATA's customers are (demographics), how they use the system, and how they rate the quality and effectiveness of the services provided. Furthermore, customer surveys represent a key component of DATA's ongoing public outreach process.

Surveys were conducted onboard DATA buses from April 16 through April 23, 2011. Separate questionnaires and samples were used for the BCC route and the regular DATA routes. Because the questionnaires were significantly different, the results presented in this report treat the two surveys separately. A total of 6,491 DATA riders boarded and were approached during the surveyed trips. They were asked to participate in the survey. Of those boarding:

- 1,333 said they had already completed a survey.
- Another 1,730 were unwilling to participate
- 689 appeared to be younger than 16 and were not approached.
- 313 spoke a language other than English or Spanish.
- A total of 2,426 accepted questionnaires and 2,047 completed them, which amounts to 84% of those accepting a questionnaire and 32% of all those boarding.

Issues and Analysis

The purpose of this memo is to inform City Council members about the Designing Better Bus Service in Durham project: results of the April on-board customer satisfaction survey, the public involvement strategy, the proposed schedule, and Draft Goals. Designing Better Bus

Service will result in a fiscally-constrained, 3-year plan for DATA routes and services (FY2012-FY2014). Included in the plan will be three funding scenarios: the first scenario includes the same revenue sources that are currently available; the second scenario includes additional funding received through the implementation of the half cent sales tax for transit; and the third scenario includes funding sources in addition to current funding (other than the half cent sales tax).

On-Board Customer Satisfaction Survey Findings

DATA services, excluding Bull City Connector (BCC)

- Frequency of use. DATA services are used intensively: 53% of its riders use it seven days each week.
 - There has been expanded use of transit by existing customers. Among DATA riders, 37% said they were riding more often in 2011 than in 2010 while only 11% said they were riding less often.
- Trip purpose
 - DATA is providing local labor force mobility. Most trips on DATA (65%) are to get to and/or from work.
 - Many other trips are to get to and/or from school (9%) or college (21%). Thus DATA is serving the large educational institutions in the community as well as the needs of the students themselves.
- Demographics
 - Of all DATA riders, 55% are employed full time outside the home and another 27% are students.
 - More than three-fourths of DATA riders (76%) live ten minutes or less from their bus stop.
 - Like most bus systems, the ridership of DATA is young, with 49% under the age of 35. This has not changed since 2006.
 - As is true of the ridership of most bus systems, 56% of DATA riders' households report that they have household incomes of less than \$15,000. This is 7% higher than in 2006, not surprising in the current economy.
- Fares
 - Only 15% of DATA riders use cash fares. Most use unlimited ride passes of some type, most commonly (40%) a day pass. This aids cash flow, speeds boarding, and reduces the risk of lost cash.
- Customer Satisfaction
 - The satisfaction score for DATA service overall is moderately positive, with 43% rating it as excellent or very good (7 or 6 on a 7 point scale).
- Service improvements
 - When asked to rank areas for improvement, by far the most frequently cited aspect of service to improve was for "buses running on time." This was cited by 62% of riders as first, second or third most important among fourteen specific aspects of service to improve. This is cited more than two times as often than the next two aspects of service that were cited as important to improve, the behavior

of others on the buses (29%) and the time DATA buses stop running in the evening (27%).

- Asked to rank four service improvements under consideration by DATA, riders were divided on the most important aspects, with 41% choosing a shorter walk to the bus stop, and nearly as many, 38% choosing a quicker ride to the destination. Twenty eight percent (28%) chose service to un-served neighborhoods, and 24% chose direct routes to destinations, without going downtown.

Bull City Connector (BCC) Route

- Frequency of use
 - As is true of DATA routes in general, the BCC is used intensively: 48% of its riders use it six days each week and another 6% use it five days a week, for a total of 54% using it at or near the maximum days possible.
 - BCC riders also tend to use DATA routes: 32% said they use them daily while another 25% use them more than once a week.
- Ridership change
 - It is clear that the BCC route has attracted many new riders because 56% said that they had begun using either BCC or DATA only in the past year and another 9% said that the day of the survey was the day of their first use of either BCC or DATA.
 - Asked whether they expected to use BCC/DATA in the coming year more or less often or cease using it, 44% of BCC riders said they expect to use BCC/DATA more often. In the survey of DATA riders, only 29% said they expect to use DATA more often. This is a clear indicator of satisfaction with the new, free, and relatively direct service of BCC.
- Trip purpose
 - More trips on BCC (43%) are to get to and/or from work than for any other purpose, and another 9% involve getting to or from meeting for work, making a total of 51% of trips being work-related.
 - Many other trips are to get to and/or from middle or high school (3%) or college (11%).
 - Of all BCC riders, 41% are employed full time outside the home and another 5% are employed students, for a total of 46%.
- Demographics
 - Of all BCC riders, 23% said they are employees of Duke University, and another 15% said they were Duke students. None said they were employees of NCCU and only 2% said they were students there.
 - Like DATA, in general, the ridership of BCC is young, with 48% under the age of 35 compared to essentially the same percentage (49%) for DATA.
 - Similar to DATA riders in general (56%), many BCC riders (49%) report that they have household incomes of less than \$15,000. Incomes of BCC rider households, however, tend to be slightly higher than those of DATA riders in general. While 11% of DATA riders report income in excess of \$35,000, this is true of more than twice as many BCC riders, 24%.

- Customer satisfaction
 - The overall satisfaction score for BCC is quite high, with 54% rating it "Excellent" (7 on a 7 point scale). BCC riders rate DATA service in general lower than they rate BCC service: 41% rate it as being Excellent. However both of these ratings are much higher than the 23% of DATA riders who rated DATA service overall as excellent.
- Service improvements
 - As with DATA service in general, when riders were asked to rank areas for improvement, by far the most frequently cited aspect of service was for the "buses running on time." This was cited by 66% of BCC riders as first, second or third most important to improve. This is far more than the next two aspects of service that were cited as important to improve, service to all places you would like to go (34%) and the behavior of others on the buses (24%).

Public Involvement Strategy

Significant public involvement is planned as part of Designing Better Bus Service in Durham. There will be four rounds of opportunities for the general public to provide comments to Triangle Transit and the consultant. These meetings will be open house style workshops and advertised to the public. In addition, a Sounding Board has been selected of 25 members of the public representing diverse interests and backgrounds of the Durham community. The Sounding Board will meet regularly throughout the length of the process with Triangle Transit and the consultant and will present recommendations to the City Council along with the Final Draft Plan in June 2012. The Sounding Board meetings will be open to the public and advertised.

Project Schedule

The proposed schedule for Designing Better Bus Service in Durham is as follows:

- City Council presentations:
 - March 2012 – Public hearing for Draft Plan
 - June 2012 – Request adoption of Final Draft Plan
- Four rounds of public involvement:
 - November 15, 2011 – December 9, 2011 on Current Conditions, Draft Goals
 - January 10, 2012 – February 3, 2012 on Service Alternatives
 - March 6, 2012 – March 30, 2012 on Draft Plan
 - April 17, 2012 – May 4, 2012 on Final Draft Plan
- Sounding Board meetings
 - 2011: Oct 18, Nov 29
 - 2012: Jan 10, Jan 31, Feb 28, Mar 27, Apr 10, Apr 24

Draft Goals

Triangle Transit has developed Draft Goals for the Durham Area Transit Authority that will be available for public comment in November (see Attachment B). The goals will guide the development of service alternatives and will be used to monitor on-going service performance after the implementation of the plan. Triangle Transit and the consultant, PB, are interested in receiving comments from City Council members on the Draft Goals.

Alternatives

This is an informational agenda item and thus an alternative is not needed.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact associated with this agenda item.

SDBE Summary

Due to the nature of this agenda item, an SDBE summary is not needed.

Attachments

- A. On-Board Customer Satisfaction Survey Results presentation slides
- B. Draft Goals for the Durham Area Transit Authority